



Original Article

International Journal of Educational Research and Technology

P-ISSN 0976-4089; E-ISSN 2277-1557

IJERT: Volume 6 [1] March 2015: 26-31

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ISO 9001: 2008 Certified Organization

Website: www.soeagra.com/ijert.html

Pre-Service Special Education Preparation Programs In Jordan And The United States: An Update

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Received 22.10.2014

Revised 08.12.2014

Accepted 12.01.2015

How to cite this article: Khaled A. Al Atyat, Mohammad A. Beirat, Ghaleb M. Al-Hiary. Pre-Service Special Education Preparation Programs In Jordan And The United States: An Update. *Inter. J. Edu. Res. Technol.* 6[1] March 2015; 26-31. DOI: 10.15515/ijert.0976-4089.6.1.2631

INTRODUCTION

The passing of Persons with Disabilities Law in Jordan (1993) shifted most services and responsibilities of individuals with disabilities from the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) to the Ministry of Education (MOE). This law shifted services to the Ministry of Education and public schools. The Ministry of Education established a special education division as a part of "Special Education Department", and slowly implemented a resource room model in its schools (Al Khatib, 2007). Further, many private schools and special education centers are now providing similar, commercially-based special education services for children and adults with disabilities (Al-hiary, 2008; MOE, 2012; MSW, 2015). Although better-qualified resource room teachers serve students with disabilities, many others are enrolled in regular education schools without any organized assistance from either general or special education teachers (Al-Bataineh, 2002). There still a huge shortage of services for those children and their families. Al-Bataineh (2002) suggested that Jordan needed a more comprehensive policies to meet the needs of students with disabilities through recruiting more qualified teachers, developing in-service training and increasing funding for special education. Through years, one of Jordan ambitious goal is to development higher education to compensate for the lack of natural resources (Zoeph, 2006). Special education is not forgotten in this matter. Today, Seven public universities have special education preparation programs. Other private universities provide similar programs. In addition, several community colleges provide 2-year pre-service programs. These numbers are expected to increase as other university programs are developed. One major limitation of special education teacher preparation in Jordan is an over emphasis on knowledge acquisition and theoretical issues. These programs are shaped by inadequate field-based experiences. Thus, the teachers' practical skills (Al Khatib, 2007). This limitation has also been indicated in Western universities as well (Carroll, 2003), but is more pronounced in Jordan, as Al Khatib (2007) indicate.

Literature Review

Although special education services in Jordan started in the early 1960s, it was not until the 1980s when several two-year community colleges started an official special education preparation programs. In late 1980s, the Jordan University started its first Masters Program in special education. It was not until 1993 when Jordan had its first law for individuals with disabilities (Law No. 17 of 1993). However, the law was far behind societal ambitions, and that lead to new law in 2007 (Law No. 31 of 2007). Unfortunately, the current law (2007) is still ambiguous and far from ambitions, according to many authorities in the field (Al Khatib & Hadidi, 2009). Additionally, many issues are being reintroduced and other emerging. One of the new-old hot issues is preparing and qualifying special education teachers (Al-hiary & Kinnison, 2008; Al Khatib & Al Khatib, 2008; Al Khatib & Hadidi, 2009; Bataineh, 2009). The issues of qualified teacher is surfing now heavily to be one of the top issues concerning stakeholders.

In 2007, Jordan established Higher Education Accreditation Commission. The goal of this commission is to construct specific criteria for each major in universities and colleagues, which include special education. Students should study not less than 132 credited hours (CH) divided as follow:

1. University requirements: (27 CH),

2. College requirements: 15% of credited hours (19.8 CH)
3. Core requirement: 60% of credited hours (79.2 CH)
4. Optional free courses: 6 CH maximum.

However, until now, there are many universities are not fully committed to these criteria. The commission is pushing toward full commitment to these criteria, and some programs are going to be ceased if not committed by the beginning of the new academic yeas (2015/2016). The Ministry of Education (MOE, 2006; 2012) indicates that a dramatic increase of special education services provided for children with special needs in public schools is being delivered in Jordanian public schools. Although increased numbers of special education teachers are being hired, many teachers from other disciplines are being assigned to these rooms (Al-Hiary & Kinnison, 2008). However, the numbers of newly hired special education teacher are not clearly provided. Additionally, numbers of those who are being assigned to special education classes from other disciplines are not clear either(Al-Hiary & Kinnison, 2008). Although of the ambitious expansion plans of the MOE and other governmental authorities, such as (MSD) and the Ministry of Health (MOH); organizations, advocates, families, and individuals of special needs are indicating the need for more services, and complaining that current services suffer from severe shortage of properly qualified personnel, including special education teachers. In addition, the global and national economic crises started in 2008 lead the government to cut-off expansion plans in many fields that include the field of special education. It is no secret that children of special needs are underserved and short of personnel providing them. In recent years, heavy criticism is being placed on teacher education programs and their role of producing high quality teachers supported by the evidence that subject matter knowledge and high verbal ability characterize effective teachers who succeeds with the greatest student achievement gains. These factors have pushed toward redefining high quality special education teachers (Goe, 2007). Today, there is an increased attention emphasized on the quality of teachers (CEC, 2004). Several professional and governmental organizations in the United States and around the world have developed standards to ensure the quality of teachers being placed in special education classrooms or any other placement (e.g. Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), U.S. department of Education, Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), and higher education accreditation authorities). Further, CEC, the largest global special education organization, suggests the minimum of a bachelor degree and emphasizes the role of pedagogy or teaching skills. CEC suggest a continuum of professional preparation for special education teachers that starts with the initial preparation, or preservice training (CEC, 2004). One study conducted by Al-hiary and Kinnison (2008) compared preservice and inservice special education preparation programs in Jordan and the United States. After reviewing the degree-plans of the five public universities in Jordan, it was noted that these universities have the minimum of 123 credited hours of coursework that emphasize pedagogy, psychology, special education categories, at least one class in methods, and another in diagnosis. All these programs have at least one semester of practicum with 12 credited hours or two semesters with 3 to 6 credited hours each. Although these degrees were modified to be 132 credited hours, the content remained almost the same. The study found that most of these programs, as in the U.S., emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and theoretical issues rather that field-based experiences. Brownell et al. (2008) indicate that effective special education teachers have to possess knowledge of the specific academic and behavioral needs of their students with disabilities, as well as knowledge of explicit instruction tailored to their students' needs. Further, Englert, Tarrant, and Marriage (1992) list features that distinguish special education teachers, which include ability to manage classroom behavior and to build a classroom community. Regardless, Brownell et al. (2008) found that research, to date, in general and special education at pre- and in-service levels, suggests that content knowledge and the ability to enact this knowledge are distinctive features of an effective special education teacher. In Jordan, universities and MOE are not any different: The effective teacher is the one who enact knowledge in his classroom.

Statement of the Problem

With the exception of Al-hiary and Kinnison (2008) study, there are no studies in the literature examining the differences in special education teachers' pre-services preparation program between Jordan and other countries. Jordan looks up to the United States as a raw-model in special education, but there are no studies currently cross-examining the similarities and the differences between the two higher education systems in special education preparation programs, hence, many of special education college faculty members are United States graduates.

Study Goal

The goal of the current study is to compare between Jordan universities and the United States universities pre-service special education preparation programs.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses descriptive information provided publically for five universities in Jordan describing their current degree-plan. Additionally, specific information will be provided about practicum training. Additionally, one example will be provided (Alhussein Bin Talal University) of core course requirement in their degree-plan. As for the United States, The study will use Texas Woman's University (TWU) as a comparison example. Information will be collected from these universities websites and other related publications. Then, data will be analyzed and presented in comparison mode.

RESULTS

In this section, the study will present descriptive information on each university of Jordan and then the same thing will be provided for TWU. Then, there will be a discussion on the focus of Jordan special education special education preparation programs and TWU special education programs. Further, the study will present an example of requirements using AHU as an example. A brief discussion will be presented on teacher education in Jordan and in-service programs in Jordan.

Table 1: Jordan Universities

University	Degree Offered	Credited Hours (CH)	Special Education CH	Practicum	Core Electives
1. University of Jordan:	BA in special education	132 CH	78 CH in special education	practicum of 12 CH	Core electives 54 CH
2. Mutah University	BS special education	132 CH	81 CH in special education	practicum of 3 + 6 CH	Core electives 51 CH
3. Tafila Technical University	BA in special education	132 CH	81 CH in special education	practicum 9 CH (3 + 6 CH)	Core electives 51 CH
4. Albalqa Applied University	BA in special education	129 CH	72 CH in special education 9 CH of Supportive coursework	Practicum 12CH (6 + 6 CH)	Core elective 48 CH
5. Alhussein Bin Talal University	BA in special education	132	81 hours in special education	practicum 12 CH	Core electives 51 CH

From the table above, it indicates that Jordan universities stipulate that students should pass not less than 129 CH to 132 CH to have their BA/BS in Special education. Of those CHs, these should be 72-81 CH of special education core courses. Additionally, students should have not less than 9 – 12 CH of practicum. It is clear that there is no consistency between Jordan universities and the variation of CH in the whole degree plan, and in special education courses can be very negative on the quality of future special education teacher. Coursework is an important aspect in providing students with content knowledge, and practicum training is a mean to deliver this knowledge into practice. These two are vital elements in assuring the quality of future special education teachers. The current finding contradicts with Higher Education Accreditation Commission criteria and regulations.

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

TWU offers a BS in Interdisciplinary Studies, where Special education is not a major. The degree is divided based on school educational levels (K-4, (K-6), 4-8). The degree contains not less than 24 CH plus student teaching. Special education is included in this degree since U.S. is shifting heavily toward full inclusion in public schools. General education teachers should have sufficient skills working with students of different educational needs and backgrounds.

Special Education Preparation

Pre-service special education preparation programs in Jordan focuses on preparing students teachers to work with mildly disabled children, blind, or deaf. Whereas, TWU offers a degree that prepare general education future-teachers to work with general cases of special education, or some programs are designed to prepare them working with deaf children and those who are deaf/blind. Table 2 presents this comparison between the two preparation programs.

Table 2: Jordan and TWU Program Focus

Jordan	TWU
Mildly Disabled	General Education
	Generic special education.
Blind & Deaf	Deaf

Practicum: Jordan

Students may not enroll in practicum at most universities until they have completed all course work listed on degree plan, or they should have their department approval. The practicum is the last semester, mostly. When two practicum experiences are required (3+6 CH, 3+9 CH, or 12 CH), these would be completed in the last two semesters. Practicum completed in a resource room in either a public or private school or a special education center.

Example of Requirements

Alhussein Bin Talal University offers a BS in special education that requires 81 CH at least of special education coursework (of 132 CH). These courses spreaded over different categories (characteristics, methods, assessment, practicum, and others). Other CHs are related to university and faculty requirements (generic requirements imposed by the university and the Faculty of Education). The following is an explanation of these courses categories.

Characteristics

- Introduction to Special Education
- Learning Disabilities
- Emotional Behavior Disorders
- Visual Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Mental Retardation
- Physical and Health Impairments
- Language and Speech Impairments

Methods

- Teaching Students with Special Needs in Regular Schools
- Teaching Arabic Language for Students with Special Needs
- Teaching Mathematics for Students with Special Needs
- Curriculum and Methods in Special Education *Assessment*
- Evaluation and Diagnosis in Special Education *Other Special Education Courses*
- Early Intervention
- English Terminology and Passages in Special Education
- Current Trends and Issues in Special Education
- *Field Experience: Practicum in Special Education*
- 12 CH, the student should have department approval and have studies not less than 90 CH of his degree plan.

Faculty Mandated Courses

- Visual Basics (computer)
- Introduction to Curriculum Planning
- Educational Statistics
- Introduction to Evaluation and Measurement
- Introduction to Educational Psychology
- Application for computer in educational technology.

Teacher Education in Jordan

In order to enter a teacher education program in Jordan, there should be a high school graduation GPA 65% or above. There is no entrance examination, and at present, no state graduation examination, however, qualification examination is planned. Currently, there is no qualification examination in special education. This being said, it should be noted that universities are currently reviewing their degree plans. Additionally, The Higher Education Accreditation Commission is planning to have accreditation standards for pre-service special education programs in universities all over Jordan.

In-Service Programs in Jordan

According to MOE, there is 531 resource room and teachers in public schools. Controversially, data suggests that there are not 531 active resource rooms in Jordan. MOE plans to open 30 new resource rooms yearly, specifically for LD students. No specific details provided about qualification of teachers. Each year the MOE provides 20 scholarships for teachers to obtain a High Diploma in LD. These teachers are from general education, mainly. Not all resource room teachers have a major in special education. Some from general education and others from 2-year program (community colleges). MOE provides workshops (1 week in length) related to LD, MR, SI, VI, or HI for newly appointed resource room teachers. Resource rooms serve 12,160 students, 20-25 students per day. The current practice policy emphasis on

individualized instruction with no specific guidelines formulated to regulate this practice. MOE stipulates a minimum requirement is 2-year degree for any hired teacher.

CONCLUSION

The current data suggests that Jordan universities differ in their special education preparation programs. The number of special education CHs are not the same, neither practicum training. This clear variability may reflect negatively on the quality of special education teachers. Comparing to their colleagues in the U.S., Jordan universities offers BS and BA in special education, while American universities offers the same degrees, but in general education with some emphasis on special education coursework.

Additionally, special education teachers in Jordan are coming mainly from general education. There are very few special education teachers working in resource rooms. The MOE provide newly special education teachers with only one week training. Although MOE provides scholarships for general education teachers to obtain their diploma in special education, the number of teachers included in this scholarship is very limited. Moreover, training sessions for in-service special education teachers are seasonal and arbitrary. There is no such clear policy for in-service training and practice for special education teachers (Al-hiary & Kinnison, 2008; Al Khatib& Al Khatib, 2008; Al Khatib&Hadidi, 2009; Bataineh, 2009).

Jordan higher education system needs a major review and reform. Quality assurance criteria needs to be established and implemented in higher education. Moreover, MOE needs to have more special education teachers in public schools. Those teachers should be special education teachers. If the MOE to have general education teachers shifting to special education, they need to be provided with the proper training; not just a one-week training. Training policy needs to be reviewed and rebuilt in order to build a better special education teacher, and, consequently provide better service for children with disabilities. Training efforts should not be arbitrary and seasonal, they need to be formulated and well-established based on evidence-based practices.

Jordanian universities are the essential training institutions for future special education teachers. Thus, their programs need to be reviewed and reformed in the light of modern criteria published by the Higher Education Accreditation Commission. The current degree-plans are a good reflection of the variation in teacher education programs.

Finally, funding of special education is a major issue that needs to be addressed by the government. Such training programs need to have proper funding to provide the best preparation programs for all teachers.

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